



Odd Men

MAX LERNER

When I was in Detroit the other day, speaking at the meetings of the Michigan teachers, I had an interesting conversation with a fellow teacher. It was about the recent reports, whether serious or tongue in cheek, that Adm. Rickover might be chosen as the new U. S. Commissioner of Education. My friend was, of course, outraged. Most American teachers, especially at NEA meetings, feel about Rickover as the White Citizens Councils do about Chief Justice Warren, or ADA members about J. Edgar Hoover.

My friend went far out in her dismissal of Rickover, saying that it was not he but the scientists who were responsible for the atom-powered submarine. I said this was nonsense. Rickover is one of the saltiest, ablest, hardest driving men of our time. He knows how to gather, organize and inspire the men he needs for a job. He would do the same in the education job. Besides, he is a consummate practitioner of the arts of insult.

He would give teachers, school superintendents, boards of education and college presidents a severe shaking-up, which is what many of them need. He is probably wrong on many of the issues of education, although he is profoundly right on the less elusive problem of turning out trained manpower. I am certain that the job would teach him some things. He might even raise enough hell to give the post some real power for a change. Yé, and he might get an education bill through Congress.

But why stop at Rickover? I am all for the novel, unorthodox appointments of the odd men who stir the sleeping dogs, bring fresh viewpoints to old and tired jobs, and catch the imagination of the country. Also, where a man (as in Rickover's case) has been faking a fracas about some problem, it may be the part of wisdom and historical irony in letting the punishment fit the crime.

So in at least half-seriousness (and sometimes more) I offer some suggestions for other appointments and replacements:

For head of the Central Intelligence Agency: Robert F. Kennedy or Hubert Humphrey. Either of them would bring to the job some basic perceptiveness about the political war, which still seems to be lacking in the CIA. Humphrey, who has shown capacity for growth, might become the first great chief of political intelligence in our history. Bobby Kennedy probably has more of a hankering for it.

For head of the Justice Dept., why not either Louis Nizer or Edward Bennett Williams. If nothing else, think of the books which would come out of the experience.

For head of the Alliance for Progress, Lyndon Johnson. His talents are going largely wasted in the Vice Presidency. He would have the right combination of verve, schmalz and toughness to handle the difficult cases among America's neighbors to the South.

For head of Congressional liaison on the President's staff: Sargent Shriver. No one has equaled his achievement in lobbying Congress for the Peace Corps. But he needs wider fields now.

For head of the Peace Corps: Robert Frost, the most youthful-minded man in public life today. If Frost would prefer something else, why not give him the job of roving ambassador?

For Secretary of State: Clark Kerr, Chancellor of the University of California, on the theory that anyone who can get along with alumni, students and faculty on a big campus ("Football for the alumni, sex for the students, parking for the faculty" is Kerr's reported formula) ought to be able to run American foreign policy.

For Secretary of Labor: George Romney. Anyone who could crash a CIO meeting in Michigan when he wasn't wanted ought to be able to ride herd on employers too.

For Secretary of Commerce: Newton Minow, for obvious reasons, which the TV industry will recall.

For head of the Democratic National Committee: Munoz Marin, if Puerto Rico will vote to join the U. S.

For head of the FBI: James Donovan, whose talents of maneuver have not been given nearly enough scope.

For head of Harvard University: Walter Lippmann. The column could be taken over by either McGeorge Bundy or Arthur Schlesinger.

I have some notions for ambassadorships too, an area in which the Kennedy Administration has had less than notable success thus far.

For Ambassador to France: Gen. Lucius Clay, the only man I know who could stand up to de Gaulle and gain his respect.

For Ambassador to India: Harry Truman. I find it delightful to think of his conversations with both Nehru and Krishna Menon, and his earthy, no-nonsense directness would win the Indian people.

For Ambassador to Egypt: David Dubinsky. After his performance with the Congressional committee, he should carry Nasser by storm.

For Ambassador to Israel: Either Cardinal Cushing or Bishop Pike. Both are tough-minded, sympathetic men, and the Israelis like that kind.

P.S.: You can probably come up with some better and older names for all these jobs. Try it.)